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Frankfurt Meets Chicago: Collaborations between the Institute for Social Research and Harold Lasswell, 1933–1941

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The Frankfurt School is rightly remembered for Critical Theory and for its condemnations of “scientism.” Nonetheless, during its American exile, the Frankfurt School developed a remarkably constructive relationship with leading advocates for the scientific study of politics, particularly Harold Lasswell. That relationship offers an intriguing new perspective on the history of political science. First, it helps explain why the Frankfurt School retained John Dewey as its chief representative of scientism. Second, it reveals that, despite conventional narratives concerning the incompatibility of empirical political science and normative political theory, Lasswell and the Frankfurt School found important areas of conceptual overlap, particularly with respect to the politics of culture.

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The Critical Theory, as practiced by the *Institut für Sozialforschung*¹ during the 1930s and 1940s, is rightly remembered for condemning “scientism”² and its imminent colonization of the social sciences. The Institute’s assault on scientism

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1. Hereafter I refer to the *Institut* by its English title, the Institute for Social Research, or by its conventional colloquialisms, the “Frankfurt School” and “Critical Theory.”

2. The term scientism refers to the belief that “the characteristic inductive methods of the natural sciences are the only source of genuine factual knowledge and, in particular, that they alone can yield true knowledge about man and society.” This definition follows Horkheimer’s usage and is also repeated in much of the extant secondary literature on the Institute, including work by Jay and Wiggerhaus. Alan Bullock, Stephen Trombley, and Bruce Eadie, *The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 762; Max Horkheimer, “Notes on Science and the Crisis,” in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, [1932] 1972); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973); Rolf Wiggerhaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

and its alleged epigoni, positivism and pragmatism, became especially pointed after the group migrated to New York in 1934. By 1937, director Max Horkheimer declared scientism and its followers the bankrupt byproducts of the “present sad state of the middle class.”³

Given this antipathy, one might assume that Horkheimer and his Institute colleagues would have repudiated American advocates for the scientific study of politics, like Harold Lasswell. But this never happened. Despite Lasswell’s pioneering work in and emphatic support for scientific methodology, members of the Frankfurt School did not openly criticize Lasswell or indeed any his other colleagues at the University of Chicago, such as Charles Merriam. In fact, during its American exile the Institute—and particularly Horkheimer and Franz Neumann—developed a remarkably constructive relationship with Lasswell, who was a principal member of the so-called “Chicago School of Political Science.”⁴

Little critical attention has been paid to these surprising liaisons. Perhaps this is because during the early 1940s, many observers of political science depicted normative political theory (like that developed by Horkheimer and his Institute colleagues) and empirical political science (like that developed by Lasswell and his Chicago colleagues) as standing on opposite sides of a number of intellectual, political, and methodological binaries. Often, the source of those binaries was traced back to elementary divides between “philosophy” and “science,” or “European” and “American” modes of thinking. As early as 1943, the American political scientist William Foote Whyte warned that an alarming number of his colleagues had turned to “political philosophy,” when they should be “concern[ing] themselves primarily with the description and analysis of political behavior” and “leaving ethics to the philosophers.”⁵ Whyte’s article occasioned a stinging rebuttal by John Hallowell, an early domestic proponent of the work of European émigrés such as Hannah Arendt,

3. Max Horkheimer, “The Latest Attack on Metaphysics,” in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, [1932] 1972), 140.

4. Although the “Chicago School” appellation is often used to denote members of the Sociology Department at the University of Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s, historians of political science also use the designation to refer to the Department of Political Science at Chicago as it was developed and chaired by Charles Merriam between 1923 and 1940. As Monroe has noted, the department was “led by Merriam and two key colleagues, Harold Gosnell and Harold Lasswell,” and was “instrumental in shifting the study of politics away from a reliance on historical and constitutional approaches and toward the more systematic and objective testing of political propositions through empirical data.” Kristen Renwick Monroe, “The Chicago School: Forgotten but Not Gone,” *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 1 (2004): 95. See also Gabriel A. Almond, “Who Lost the Chicago School of Political Science?,” *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 1 (2004): 91–93; Michael T. Heaney and John Mark Hansen, “Building the Chicago School,” *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 4 (2006): 589–96.

5. William Foote Whyte, “Instruction and Research: A Challenge to Political Scientists,” *The American Political Science Review* 37, no. 4 (1943): 693, 697.

Hans Morgenthau, Leo Strauss, and Horkheimer and his colleagues.⁶ Hallowell claimed that American political science had not become increasingly philosophical but rather “increasingly positivistic.” As such, the discipline risked “denying our [ethical] responsibilities as human beings.”⁷

The oppositional narrative intensified throughout the 1940s, and by 1949 the Columbia sociologist Robert Merton depicted European social thought and “its large purposes” as “almost disdain[ing] to establish the very facts it purports to explain.”⁸ The “American variant,” by contrast, “with its small vision, focuses so much on the establishment of fact that it considers only occasionally the theoretic pertinence of the facts, once established.”⁹ A decade later, the poet and critic Francis Golfing suggested that European and American intellectuals actually held an entirely “different structure of ideas and emotions.”¹⁰ In 1966, Gabriel Almond claimed that such divisions had almost split the discipline of political science in two. Much contemporary political *theory*, Almond claimed, was stubbornly rooted in its “Mediterranean and European ... origins,” while contemporary political *science*—characterized by its “emphasis on systematic field research” and “rigorous logical methods”—was “relatively new, and at the present time ... almost entirely American.”¹¹ Sheldon Wolin reinforced this characterization three years later with his depiction of “epic theory” and its solemn struggle against “methodism.”¹² Because of these and other oppositional depictions of normative political theory and empirical political science during the 1940s and beyond, association between scholars aligned with these approaches were soon deemed unfeasible and prior collaborations retroactively dismissed or forgotten.

6. For further discussion of the Whyte-Hallowell *contretemps*, see John G. Gunnell, “American Political Science, Liberalism, and the Invention of Political Theory,” in *Discipline and History: Political Science in the United States*, ed. James Farr and Raymond Seidelman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993b), 179–97. For more detailed accounts of the early history of the “split” between political theory and political science, see Robert Adcock and Mark Bevir, “The Remaking of Political Theory,” in *Modern Political Science: Anglo-American Exchanges since 1880*, ed. Robert Adcock, Mark Bevir, and Shannon C. Stimson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 209–33; John G. Gunnell, *The Descent of Political Theory: The Genealogy of an American Vocation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993a); John G. Gunnell, “Dislocated Rhetoric: The Anomaly of Political Theory,” *Journal of Politics* 68, no. 4 (2006): 771–82.

7. John Hallowell, “Politics and Ethics,” *The American Political Science Review* 38, no. 4 (1944): 640, 655.

8. Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, [1949] 1968), 497–98.

9. Merton, *Social Theory*, 498.

10. Francis Golfing, “The American and European Minds Compared: An Essay in Definition,” *Commentary* 28, no. 6 (1959): 507.

11. Gabriel A. Almond, “Political Theory and Political Science,” *The American Political Science Review* 60, no. 4 (1966): 870.

12. Sheldon Wolin, “Political Theory as a Vocation,” *The American Political Science Review* 63, no. 4 (1969): 1082.

Recent work by John Gunnell,¹³ Ira Katznelson,¹⁴ and others¹⁵ has usefully contextualized and critiqued many of these combative narratives. Gunnell, for instance, contends that few of the attacks by either side during these years could “withstand much analytical scrutiny.” Furthermore, much of the lofty rhetoric deployed during the *contretemps* belied what was oftentimes a quite practical struggle for professional status, intellectual authority, and limited funding sources.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Gunnell also affirms that the political thought of European émigrés in the U.S. academy “could not, in most cases, have been more at odds with the substantive content and purpose” of much mainstream American political science.¹⁷ Ultimately, individuals associated with these two groups could find little to talk about with one other, save their mutual animosity.

Katznelson goes the furthest in questioning the supposed divide between “European” and “American” approaches to political studies. He argues that the work of Arendt and fellow émigré Karl Polanyi actually shared with American political scientists, such as Lasswell, David Truman, and Robert Dahl, a deep commitment to preserving and revitalizing Enlightenment values in the wake of the desolation of the Second World War. According to Katznelson, then, it would be a mistake (and, indeed, an impoverishment of our intellectual resources) to presume that during the 1940s European theorists and American social scientists “inhabit[ed] separate universes.”¹⁸ At the same time, however, Katznelson *excludes* the political thought of the Frankfurt School from this more capacious grouping. He argues that the Institute’s brand of “‘totalizing critique’ was so

13. See Gunnell’s aforementioned works, as well as John G. Gunnell, “The Founding of the American Political Science Association: Discipline, Profession, Political Theory, and Politics,” *The American Political Science Review* 100, no. 4 (2006): 479–86.

14. Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

15. See, for instance, Benjamin R. Barber, “The Politics of Political Science: ‘Value-Free’ Theory and the Wolin-Strauss Dust-up of 1963,” *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 4 (2006): 539–45; James Farr, “Transactions of European-American Political Science,” *European Political Science* 5, no. 2 (2006): 171–82; John S. Dryzek, “Revolutions without Enemies: Key Transformations in Political Science,” *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 4 (2006): 487–92; Nicolas Guilhot, “The Realist Gambit: Postwar American Political Science and the Birth of IR Theory,” *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 4 (2008): 281–304; David Kettler, “The Political Theory Question in Political Science, 1956–1967,” *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 4 (2006): 531–37; John O’Neill and Thomas Uebel, “Horkheimer and Neurath: Restarting a Disrupted Debate,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (2004): 75–105; John O’Neill and Thomas Uebel, “Logical Empiricism as Critical Theory? The Debate Continues,” *Analyse & Kritik* 30, no. 2 (2008): 379–98; Ido Oren, *Our Enemies and Us: America’s Rivalries and the Making of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

16. Gunnell, “American Political Science,” 180–81. See also Emily Hauptmann, “From Opposition to Accommodation: How Rockefeller Foundation Grants Redefined Relations between Political Theory and Social Science in the 1950s,” *The American Political Science Review* 100, no. 4 (2006): 643–49.

17. Gunnell, “Dislocated Rhetoric,” 777.

18. Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment*, 117. I thank an anonymous *Polity* reviewer for bringing Katznelson’s work to my attention.

thorough, complete, and pessimistic" that it could not sustain productive dialogue with the critical but nevertheless hopeful liberalism of Arendt, Polanyi, Lasswell, and others.¹⁹

The continued reluctance to see empirical political science as sharing much in common with normative political theory during the mid-twentieth century—and especially not with the Institute's brand of theory—can tempt one to dismiss the periodic collaboration between Horkheimer, Lasswell, and their colleagues as simply professional propriety, with ultimately no bearing on the intellectual aims of each camp. This paper challenges this supposition and the outlook that informs it, and argues that these scholars took an active interest in and even substantively aided each other's work throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, especially as it related to the politics of culture.

The relationship that developed between Horkheimer and Lasswell (and also Neumann and, to a lesser extent, Merriam) offers intriguing new perspectives on the history of political science. First, this relationship may help explain why Institute members chose (or at least retained) John Dewey—and not another contemporary figure—as the chief antagonist in their attacks on scientism. Although several recent studies have explored and challenged the Institute's interpretation of Dewey, some puzzling questions remain.²⁰ For instance, if the Frankfurt School saw the American academy as overrun with *positivists* and their kin, like logical empiricists,²¹ why was the group preoccupied with Deweyan *pragmatism*? Why did they not supplement their critique of him with sustained analyses of other American social scientists? Was this reticence due, at least in part, to the personal and intellectual connections that Horkheimer and Neumann had forged with Lasswell and Merriam?

Second, the liaisons between individual members of the Frankfurt and Chicago Schools suggest that our understanding of seemingly deep and ineluctable political and methodological divisions in our discipline remains incomplete. Notwithstanding conventional disciplinary narratives, Frankfurt School Critical Theory and empirical social science have not *always* clashed. Indeed, Horkheimer, Neumann, and Lasswell all considered themselves to be on common ground in treating culture as a body of symbols and practices used by elites to

19. Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment*, 38–39.

20. See Matthew Festenstein, "Inquiry as Critique: On the Legacy of Deweyan Pragmatism for Political Theory," *Political Studies* 49, no. 4 (2001): 729–48; Hans Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Alison Kadlec, "Reconstructing Dewey: The Philosophy of Critical Pragmatism," *Polity* 38, no. 4 (2006): 519–42.

21. In 1936, for example, Horkheimer complained to long-time Institute member Henryk Grossman that logical empiricism "is currently the favourite philosophical fashion in academic circles." It was "impossible to exaggerate," Horkheimer continued, "the way in which this approach has triumphed across the whole field in scientific circles, particularly in the Anglo-American world." Quoting Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 184.

maintain their social and political authority. If we fail to recognize the historical complexity of disciplinary divisions during the 1940s (and afterwards), we run the risk of forgetting important conceptual overlaps such as this, and of exaggerating the depth and breadth of the fractures experienced today. This is not to claim that all strands of Critical Theory and of empirical political science were or are compatible. But, depicting these two approaches to political studies as polar opposites oversimplifies what was, for certain scholars associated with these approaches during the 1930s and early 1940s, a more complex relationship.

The remainder of the article has three sections. It, first, surveys the Frankfurt School's public condemnations of scientism and focuses on the group's equation of positivism with Deweyan pragmatism. It then describes the Institute's relationship with Lasswell and Merriam, particularly as it related to their research on the politics of culture. The paper concludes with reflections on common, present-day narratives about the allegedly oppositional relationship of Critical Theory and empirical political science during the 1930s and 1940s.

Institute Attacks on Scientism: Positivism, Pragmatism, and Dewey

Horkheimer was undoubtedly the foremost critic of scientism within the *Institut für Sozialforschung*. He formulated one of the group's first public criticisms of the approach in his inaugural address as Director in 1931. He noted that under the leadership of its previous director, Carl Grünberg, a "considerable part" of the Institute's work had exhibited "a strongly empirical character,"²² and recommended a shift from the approach of his predecessor toward a more dialectical "social philosophy."²³ While the Institute's research could be "enriched and supplemented by empirical work," its primary goal was now to advance "materialist theory."²⁴

The following year, Horkheimer presented a more pointed assessment of scientism in a short piece written for the Institute's new publication, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. In "Notes on Science and the Crisis," he argued that without a comprehensive understanding of "the true nature of society, built as it is on contrarities," modern science "lacks a theoretical grounding" and was therefore dangerously relativistic.²⁵ Horkheimer thus declared himself at odds with both

22. Tom Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School and Its Critics* (London: Routledge, 2002), 12. See also Institute for Social Research, *Ten Years on Morningside Heights: A Report on the Institute's History, 1934 to 1944* (New York: Institute for Social Research, 1944).

23. Max Horkheimer, "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, [1931] 1995), 1–14.

24. Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 25.

25. Horkheimer, "Notes," 7–8.

positivism and pragmatism, which he identified as the two most pervasive strands of scientism, because both philosophies idolized science only for its “productive power” and were, therefore, dangerously relativistic.²⁶

Horkheimer repeated this assessment three years later, in “On the Problem of Truth.” Referring to the work of William James and John Dewey, Horkheimer declared pragmatism to be “closely related to positivism” because both “attribute[d] to the positive, exact sciences a primary purpose of control.”²⁷ From 1932 on, then, the Institute director viewed pragmatism and positivism as virtually indistinguishable, and therefore equally condemnable instantiations of scientism.

His attack on scientism culminated in 1937, with the publication of two long essays in the *Zeitschrift*, “Traditional and Critical Theory” and “The Latest Attack on Metaphysics.” The “Metaphysics” article, arguably the Institute’s clearest criticism of positivism, was especially damning. Here Horkheimer claimed that positivist social science, in its efforts to mimic the natural sciences, had become increasingly unable to challenge, question, or meaningfully interpret social phenomena. Positivism, by associating facticity with the immediately observable, assumed that the world, as it exists now, could not be otherwise.²⁸ Any sort of critical assessment was rejected outright, since it would ostensibly color the data, destabilizing its scientific status as an unmediated reflection of the natural world. Therefore, Horkheimer argued, while positivist studies of society *could* be used to predict and possibly mitigate deleterious phenomena like market fluctuations, infant mortality rates, or public displeasure with specific policies, the studies could just as easily be used to make predictions regarding a population’s “observance of stringent regulations, their frugality during a wartime food shortage, their passivity in the face of the persecution and extermination of their best friends, their manifestations of joy at public festivals and at the favorable outcome of the election of a brutal and deceitful bureaucracy.”²⁹ The Institute Director had drawn a straight line from positivism to fascism, and insisted that without a deeper understanding of *what* social science is for, *why* it pursues particular goals over others, and *how* its results will be employed in a broader social context, positivism risked political cooptation.

Between 1931 and 1937, Horkheimer’s writings conveyed the Institute’s public attitude toward scientism, and toward positivism and pragmatism in particular. Other members of the group also engaged these two philosophies, but none deviated from the basic position established by their director in the 1930s.

26. *Ibid.*, 3.

27. Max Horkheimer, “On the Problem of Truth,” in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, [1935] 1995), 196, 201.

28. Max Horkheimer, “The Latest Attack on Metaphysics,” in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, [1937] 1972), 143–44.

29. Horkheimer, “Latest Attack,” 159.

After 1937, Horkheimer presented another extended criticism of positivism in *Eclipse of Reason*, a book designed as a companion piece to his and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.³⁰ The central argument of *Eclipse* was that modern civilization had become devoted to a new and dangerous form of thought, termed "subjective" or "instrumental reason." This form of thought rejected questions of valuation and, instead, explored "the adequacy of procedures for purposes more or less taken for granted and supposedly self-explanatory."³¹ *Eclipse* was intended to offer an expansive critique of modernity itself, and Horkheimer marshalled many of his earlier attacks against positivism, and especially those against pragmatism, to advance the book's broader goal. He identified John Dewey as the contemporary standard-bearer for instrumental rationality and in his discussion of Dewey's supposed veneration of science, repeated arguments from "Notes" and especially "Problem of Truth":

Modern *positivists* seem inclined to accept the natural sciences, primarily physics, as the model for correct methods of thinking. Perhaps Mr. Dewey gives the main motive for this irrational predilection when he writes: 'Modern methods of experimental observation have wrought a profound transformation in the subject matters of astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology' and 'the change wrought in them has exercised the deepest influence upon human relations.'³²

According to Horkheimer, the problem with this attitude was that science could not serve, on its own, as "the sole power by which humanity can be saved."³³ In fact, the opposite was often the case, as the Nazi gas chambers had shown all too clearly. Thus in worshipping the physical sciences for their "so-called objectivity," modern positivists, with Dewey at their head, emptied the sciences of all "human content."³⁴

Horkheimer was not the only Institute member to criticize Dewey during the 1940s. Herbert Marcuse had anticipated many of Horkheimer's criticisms in a 1941 review of Dewey's *Theory of Valuation* that appeared in the Institute's English language journal, *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science (SPSS)*. Like Horkheimer, Marcuse never doubted that Dewey was a positivist, and asserted that *Valuation* "provides an appropriate occasion for discussing the social function of positivism."³⁵ Allegedly, because Dewey's "positivism" judged values in terms of

30. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London: Continuum, [1947] 2004); Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1944] 2002).

31. Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, 3.

32. Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, 51; emphasis added., quoting John Dewey, "Anti-Naturalism in Extremis," *Partisan Review* 10 (1943): 26.

33. Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, 51.

34. Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, 51–52.

35. Herbert Marcuse, "Theory of Valuation," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, no. 1 (1941): 145.

their observable outcomes, it could not explain which values should be pursued in the first place.³⁶ Marcuse admitted that Dewey *intended* to promote values like freedom or autonomy. But Dewey's "positivist" philosophy, when taken to its logical conclusion, implied that *any* value, fascistic or otherwise, could be deemed "good," provided it achieved its desired ends in an efficient manner.³⁷

Over the past quarter century, several scholars have disputed the Frankfurt School's treatment of Dewey as a fascist apologist and positivist *par excellence*.³⁸ Several obvious problems plagued Horkheimer's and Marcuse's readings of Dewey. The most obvious was terminological and genealogical. The philosophic antecedents and assumptions of Deweyan pragmatism differed from those of positivism. Dewey's thinking had more in common with the "critical" philosophies of Kant and Hegel than with the thought of Hume or Comte (two thinkers the Institute routinely labeled as forerunners of modern positivism).³⁹ This is not to say that Horkheimer and Marcuse's criticisms of positivism could not apply *in principle* to Dewey's thought, but in condemning pragmatism *as* positivism the Institute demonstrated ignorance of what pragmatism, in fact, was (or at least where it stood in relation to other schools of modern philosophy).

Second and more importantly, Dewey never produced a work that employed empirical social scientific methods, and none that took a science like physics for its "model" (as Horkheimer had argued). Dewey *was* an ardent supporter of "science," as Lasswell himself acknowledged,⁴⁰ but his definition of the term was

36. Marcuse, "Theory of Valuation," 146.

37. Marcuse, "Theory of Valuation," 147. Alongside Horkheimer and Marcuse, the other key figure to take up the Institute's campaign against scientism was Adorno, though his most pointed comments on the topic were written after his return to Germany. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno offer several scattered critiques of both positivism and pragmatism. See Theodor W. Adorno, "Contemporary German Sociology," in *Transactions of the Fourth World Congress of Sociology* (London: International Sociological Association, 1959), 33–56; Theodor W. Adorno, "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America," in *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930–1960*, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 338–70.

38. See the aforementioned works by Festenstein, Joas, and Kadlec. Roudy Hildreth and Robert Westbrook also comment on the Frankfurt School's reading of Dewey, though in broader and briefer terms. See Roudy W. Hildreth, "Reconstructing Dewey on Power," *Political Theory* 37, no. 6 (2009): 781; Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 187 n.142.

39. See John Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," in *The Later Works, 1925–1953: Volume 2*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, [1925] 1984), 3–21; James Farr, "John Dewey and American Political Science," *American Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 2 (1999): 520–541; Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Westbrook, *John Dewey*.

40. Toward the end of his career, Lasswell stated that his approach to the policy sciences was "a contemporary adaptation of the general approach to public policy that was recommended by John Dewey and his colleagues in the development of American pragmatism." As Farr has noted, there is little other direct evidence that Lasswell was a wholehearted adherent of Deweyan pragmatism. Harold D. Lasswell, *A Pre-View of Policy Sciences* (New York: American Elsevier Publishing, 1971), xiii–xiv; Farr, "John Dewey," 536.

idiosyncratic and purposefully broad. For instance, Dewey took pains to clarify that “science,” for him, did not refer to a specialized field of knowledge accessible only to trained experts.⁴¹ Rather, the term denoted a general attitude or approach to (social) inquiry free from “control by routine, prejudice, dogma, unexamined tradition, sheer self-interest.” It referred to “the will to inquire, to examine, to discriminate, to draw conclusions only on the basis of evidence after taking pains to gather all available evidence.”⁴² This broad vision of scientific inquiry often led Dewey to criticize positivism directly, especially its “unreasoning devotion to physical science as a model.”⁴³ As he stated in *The Public and Its Problems*, the “assimilation of human science to physical science represents...only another form of absolutistic logic, a kind of physical absolutism.”⁴⁴ To apply natural scientific methods to society was to “reduce human beings to the plane of inanimate things mechanically manipulated from without; it makes human education something like the training of fleas, dogs, and horses.”⁴⁵

Third and finally, Dewey *did* hold that freedom and autonomy were desirable, and that their opposites were not. Horkheimer seemed to miss the normative content of Deweyan pragmatism entirely, despite the prominence of social values in Dewey’s work, particularly during the late 1930s and early 1940s.⁴⁶ Marcuse, who admitted that Dewey at least *intended* to promote progressive social values, was on relatively safer ground. Whether Dewey’s philosophy failed in this endeavor is a question I will not attempt to answer. It is worth noting, however, that Marcuse rejected Deweyan pragmatism not because it did *not* value freedom, but because the philosophy posited that the masses *did*. According to Marcuse, society cared nothing for freedom. Society desired “strong protection,” “lust[ed] for cruelty,” and wanted “liberation from the burden of autonomy.”⁴⁷ Yet in presenting this

41. John Dewey, “The Public and Its Problems,” in *The Later Works, 1925–1953: Volume 2*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, [1927] 1984), 337.

42. John Dewey, “Unity of Science as a Social Problem,” in *The Later Works, 1925–1953: Volume 13*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, [1938] 1988), 273.

43. John Dewey, “Social Science and Social Control,” in *The Later Works, 1925–1953: Volume 6*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, [1931] 1985), 64.

44. Dewey, “Public and Its Problems,” 359–60.

45. Dewey, “Public and Its Problems,” 359. This capacious definition of science appears repeatedly in Dewey’s work. See, for instance, John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, Paul Carus Lectures (La Salle: Open Court, [1925] 1987), 134–135; John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, [1939] 1989), 102–118; Dewey, “Anti-Naturalism in Extremis,” 35. Given that Horkheimer relied heavily on the last essay for his arguments in *Eclipse*, he no doubt read the deliberately broad definition of science that Dewey offered there.

46. Such concerns animated the bulk of *The Public and Its Problems*, published in 1927, but were the main themes of *Freedom and Culture*, published in 1939. See also several of the essays and lectures Dewey gave between 1939 and 1941, including “Creative Democracy,” “The Basis for Hope,” and “Higher Learning and War.” All are published in John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925–1953: Volume 14*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988).

47. Marcuse, “Theory of Valuation,” 147.

argument via a review of *Theory of Valuation*, Marcuse was constructing a foil for a much broader claim that had less to do with Dewey's actual work than with modernity itself.

Clearly, the Frankfurt School during the 1930s and 1940 was (1) hostile toward positivism, and (2) viewed Dewey as the chief representative of positivism, at least within the American academy. Was the Institute unaware of scholars besides Dewey who could be more aptly termed positivist, and more aptly viewed as supporters of scientism? Moreover, why did the Critical Theorists target Dewey almost exclusively? Several other émigré scholars had fiercely criticized empirical social science during the 1940s and 1950s—for example, Hans Morgenthau and Leo Strauss, both of whom settled at Chicago's Political Science Department after Merriam's influence had declined there. But, few of these critics were as fixated on Dewey as the Institute.⁴⁸ One therefore wonders if the Frankfurt School's critiques of Dewey were informed by anything beyond simple misreading or misrecognition.

The Institute Comes to America: Contact and Collaboration with Lasswell

The Frankfurt School was in fact well aware of the work and reputations of other scientifically inclined social scientists, and especially of those associated with the Chicago School of Political Science. Some members of these two groups even supported each other's work. It is thus possible that the Institute's focus on Dewey as its chief positivist adversary was due in part to its constructive relationship with the Chicago School of Political Science, especially Lasswell.

When members of the Frankfurt and Chicago Schools first came into contact, they had only cursory knowledge of each other's work. In fact, the circumstances of their initial interaction were rather unusual. The Institute had

48. Morgenthau's and Strauss's relationships with Lasswell are fascinating, but I do not have the space to discuss them fully here. Morgenthau's most pointed attack against scientism, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, refrained from attacking Lasswell or Merriam by name—much like the Institute. Strauss showed no such compunction and developed an edited volume that pilloried Lasswell as a purveyor of "scientific propaganda." Why were Strauss and his associates willing to name names in their attacks on scientism, while both Morgenthau and the Institute did not? In Morgenthau's case, professional propriety may have played a determining factor (whereas for the Institute it was one reason among others). In 1938, Morgenthau had been introduced to Lasswell via a personal letter of recommendation written by none other than Horkheimer. It is at least conceivable that Morgenthau did not wish to trample upon that earlier show of support by both Horkheimer and Lasswell. Moreover, as Guilhot has discussed, during the early 1950s Morgenthau was building a relationship with the Social Science Research Council at the University of Chicago, and was doubtless aware that the SSRC originated as an endeavor of Merriam's. Strauss was not similarly beholden, professionally speaking. Nor did his scholarship share much of anything in common with Lasswell or Merriam. Robert Horwitz, "Scientific Propaganda: Harold D. Lasswell," in *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, ed. Herbert J. Storing (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 225; Max Horkheimer to Harold D. Lasswell, 15 February 1938, Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box I, folder 16, document 96; Guilhot, "Realist Gambit," 292.

fled Frankfurt for Geneva in 1933 after the rise of Hitler, and was looking to leave Europe entirely. According to Thomas Wheatland, during their search for a university sponsor, Horkheimer and company focused on social scientists and sociology departments they thought would likely sympathize with the Institute's intellectual and methodological approach. Horkheimer mailed a biography of the Institute and a sampling of its work to a number of universities, including Yale, Harvard, Columbia, and the University of Chicago. Each had been suggested as a possible host because an individual scholar or department had shown interest in themes, such as "authority, the family, social psychology, economics, and labor," relevant to the Institute's research program.⁴⁹ Ultimately, Horkheimer accepted an invitation from Robert Mclver's sociology department at Columbia, where the Institute would remain officially housed until 1946.

However, before the Institute began negotiating with Columbia in earnest in mid-1934, the group had seriously considered making the University of Chicago its new home.⁵⁰ Erich Fromm over the years had developed contacts with several important researchers at both the University and the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute (CPI). In 1932, the German psychoanalyst Karen Horney invited Fromm to become an affiliate of the CPI, and he accepted the invitation and briefly visited Chicago. In late 1933, Fromm returned to continue his work with the CPI, and explored the possibility of relocating the Institute to the city.⁵¹ He rekindled acquaintances with such researchers as Horney and Franz Alexander, and also introduced himself and members of the Institute to social scientists at the University of Chicago, including William Ogburn, Donald Slessinger, and Lasswell. These scholars were intrigued by the Institute's work, especially "the Horkheimer Circle's use of social psychology in their studies of authority and the family."⁵² Fromm's negotiations with the University of Chicago were abandoned, however, after Horkheimer learned of Columbia University's enticing offer. Nothing in Fromm's initial contact with the University of Chicago suggests that it (and Lasswell in particular) was interested in anything more than advancing and broadening social science scholarship at the University, and at providing much-needed shelter for an intriguing group of political exiles. Yet, the 1933 exchanges proved not to be the final communication between members from these two groups.

In a 1935 issue of the *Zeitschrift*, the Institute published an article by Lasswell on the Taos, a pueblo-dwelling Native American tribe. Lasswell argued that changes in

49. Thomas Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 44.

50. Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 44, 380 n.377.

51. Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 143.

52. Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 44.

Taos peyote rituals arose because of contact with foreign cultures.⁵³ Tribal elites, he maintained, had sought to “manipulate” an influential “body of symbols and practices”—that is, peyote rituals—in order to “maintain authority in a shifting environment” with a “minimum of dissent.”⁵⁴ The tribe’s political elites thus relied upon the cultural practices to consolidate their power, particularly in times of crisis.

Cultural anthropology was not an Institute bailiwick, but members of the group found the article intriguing. In a letter to Lasswell that assessed the submission, Horkheimer said that he appreciated the manuscript “not only because the contents are closely related to our own field of interest, but also it gives me the extreme pleasure of welcoming you as our collaborator.”⁵⁵ Lasswell responded a week later and noted that he was “very much gratified at your invitation to contribute to your journal and I am doubly gratified that you found the article interesting.”⁵⁶ This exchange is noteworthy, not only because the Institute published Lasswell’s work, but also because the group *invited* him to submit an original piece of scholarship. Such solicitation was highly unusual, as the *Zeitschrift* was a largely insular, German language-only publication reserved “almost exclusively” for Institute members.⁵⁷ The journal sometimes opened its pages to outsiders, but these contributions were usually review articles, written in German, and authored by friends, colleagues, or associates of the Institute. On the rare occasions when the journal did publish an English-language essay authored by an outsider, both the topic of the article and the contributor were normally clearly sympathetic to the group’s *modus operandi*. Of course, Lasswell’s intellectual interests *were* diverse and included psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology, Marxist theory, and pragmatist philosophy. Still, both during and after his life, Lasswell was widely known as an empirical social *scientist*, if not a proto-behavioralist. For instance, he described his work as the product of a “scientific mind,” preoccupied “not with prophecy, but with prediction.”⁵⁸ Elsewhere he declared that “the science of politics states conditions” while the “philosophy of politics justifies preferences,” and he squarely identified with the aims of the former.⁵⁹ Such comments later inspired Lasswell’s students, such as Almond and Heinz Eulau,

53. Harold D. Lasswell, “Collective Autism as a Consequence of Culture Contact: Notes on Religious Training and the Peyote Cult at Taos,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 4 (1935): 231–47.

54. Lasswell, “Collective Autism,” 232.

55. Max Horkheimer to Harold D. Lasswell, 21 May 1935, Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box I, folder 16, document 99.

56. Harold D. Lasswell to Max Horkheimer, 29 May 1935, Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box I, folder 16, document 98.

57. Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 117.

58. Harold D. Lasswell, “The Measurement of Public Opinion,” *The American Political Science Review* 25, no. 2 (1931): 318.

59. Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936), 145.

to eulogize their teacher as “the most uncompromising member” of the early “behavioral revolution,” and as the innovator of “an array of methodologies” that were to become “the common property” of behavioralists during the 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁰

As a political scientist interested in empirical methods, Lasswell would not have fit the mission and culture of the *Zeitschrift* as neatly as the journal’s other American contributors, such as Charles Beard and Margaret Mead. Horkheimer’s solicitation of Lasswell becomes less paradoxical, however, if we consider their compatible interests in the politics of culture (the shared “field of interest” to which the Institute Director referred when he wrote to Lasswell in May 1935). In the mid-1930s, culture—particularly modern mass culture—was fast becoming a topic of importance to the Institute. In some ways, the Institute’s approach to the subject was informed by its earlier critiques of scientism. For members of the Institute, scientism’s supposed value neutrality meant that the existing social, political, and economic order was treated as given. It followed that the order could not and should not be altered. Horkheimer and his colleagues soon formulated a similar critique of mass culture. Like empirical social science, contemporary culture was not informed by social theory. Culture therefore could not fulfill its traditional role as a critical interpreter of social life. Scientism and culture were not only manifestations of instrumental rationality. They also illustrated its complete take-over of modern civilization. Just as positivism and pragmatism were tragic *methodological* developments in the social sciences that thwarted critical evaluations of social life, so was mass culture a tragic *ideological* development in social life that concealed the political and economic tensions intrinsic to late-modern capitalism.

One of the Frankfurt School’s first sustained attacks on mass culture appeared in Adorno’s 1938 *Zeitschrift* essay, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening.” He claimed that the popular music of capitalist societies

60. Heinz Eulau, “The Maddening Methods of Harold D. Lasswell: Some Philosophical Underpinnings,” in *Politics, Personality, and Social Science in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Harold D. Lasswell*, ed. Arnold A. Rogow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 15–16; Gabriel A. Almond, “Harold Dwight Lasswell,” *Biographical Memoirs* 57 (1987): 249. For further examples of Lasswell’s appreciation of scientific methodologies, see, for instance, Harold D. Lasswell, *Democracy Through Public Opinion* (Menasha: George Banta, 1941c); Harold D. Lasswell, “The Developing Science of Democracy,” in *The Future of Government in the United States: Essays in Honor of Charles E. Merriam*, ed. Leonard D. White (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 25–48; Harold D. Lasswell, *The Analysis of Political Behavior: An Empirical Approach* (London: Routledge, 1948b). For further secondary discussion of Lasswell’s approach to science, see Almond, “Political Theory,” 869–879; David Easton, “Harold Lasswell: Policy Scientist for a Democratic Society,” *The Journal of Politics* 12, no. 3 (1950): 450–77; James Farr, Jacob S. Hacker, and Nicole Kazee, “The Policy Scientist of Democracy: The Discipline of Harold D. Lasswell,” *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 4 (2006): 579–87; Horwitz, “Scientific Propaganda: Harold D. Lasswell,” 225–304; Morris Janowitz, “Content Analysis and the Study of the ‘Symbolic Environment,’” in *Politics, Personality, and Social Science in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Harold D. Lasswell*, ed. Arnold A. Rogow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 155–70.

was designed to convert the consumer “along his line of least resistance, into the acquiescent purchaser.”⁶¹ The genre was less art than political propaganda: “The illusion of a social preference for light music as against serious is based on that passivity of the masses which makes the consumption of light music contradict the objective interest of those who consume it.”⁶² His essay would prove something of a model for the Institute’s work on mass culture, which picked up considerably after 1938.⁶³ In 1941, for instance, Horkheimer would similarly assert that “what today is called popular entertainment is actually demands evoked, manipulated and by implication deteriorated by the cultural industries.”⁶⁴

On first examination, such claims might appear to share little with Lasswell’s relatively staid remarks on Native American peyote rituals, but Horkheimer probably recognized that his group’s basic conceptual framework resembled the one Lasswell presented in the Taos essay. Both Lasswell and the Institute interpreted cultural practices as the means by which elites convey political messages to consumers and, thereby, control or confuse them. According to Lasswell, Taos leaders deployed peyote rituals to keep tribal populations from adopting foreign belief systems, which might undermine the elites’ own political influence. According to the Institute, “the powers-that-be” in late-modern capitalism deployed popular entertainment to keep citizens from recognizing their own alienation and challenging the existing order of things.⁶⁵ To be sure, Native American peyote rituals and modern mass entertainment occurred in different cultural contexts. Yet, in both cases political elites used “a body of symbols and practices” to “maintain authority” with a “minimum of dissent.”⁶⁶

Moreover, Horkheimer and other Institute members would have known that Lasswell had conceptualized culture a similar way in his prior work on modern mass media and propaganda. Lasswell devoted much of his early career to the study of mass propaganda, a topic of study encouraged if not inspired by Merriam. Merriam, during World War I, had served as a propagandist for the Committee on

61. Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, [1938] 2001), 30.

62. Adorno, “Fetish Character,” 34.

63. In 1941, for instance, the Institute devoted an entire *SPSS* issue to mass communication. Over the years, Adorno composed several essays on music, radio, and television. The Institute’s work on culture culminated with the publication of Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in 1944, and Horkheimer’s *Eclipse of Reason* in 1947. See Max Horkheimer, in his preface to his *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, no. 1 (1941); Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2001).

64. Max Horkheimer, “Art and Mass Culture,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, no. 2 (1941): 302–03.

65. Horkheimer, “Art and Mass Culture,” 304.

66. Lasswell, “Collective Autism,” 232.

Public Information, and later wrote two books on “civic training.” They considered, among other things, mass communication.⁶⁷ When Lasswell chose as his dissertation topic European war propaganda—later published in 1927 as *Propaganda Technique in the World War*—he did so to develop one of Merriam’s “pet ideas” and perhaps even at Merriam’s suggestion.⁶⁸ Such topics were more clearly relevant to the Institute’s interests than peyote rituals.

After Lasswell joined the faculty at Chicago in 1926, mass propaganda became his specialty. His numerous articles and books between 1925 and 1948 employed new research methodologies—such as survey data, content analysis, and statistical measurement—very much in line with Merriam’s vision of a new political science. Lasswell, in these works, attempted to show that modern mass media often transmitted suggestive or otherwise powerful symbols and thereby manipulated the thoughts and actions of consumers.⁶⁹ Like the Frankfurt School, Lasswell saw this as a peculiarly modern phenomenon. Because modern life was so unstable, so complex, and so fast-paced, publics had become gradually more susceptible to subconscious signs or symbols that promised peace, security, and comfort.⁷⁰ Such

67. Bruce Lannes Smith, “The Mystifying Intellectual History of Harold D. Lasswell,” in *Politics, Personality, and Social Science in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Harold D. Lasswell*, ed. Arnold A. Rogow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 55; Charles Edward Merriam, *The Making of Citizens: A Comparative Study of Methods of Civic Training* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931); Charles E. Merriam, *Civic Education in the United States* (New York: Scribner, 1934). For further discussion of Merriam’s intellectual interests, and particularly his association with scientism, see Charles E. Merriam, “The Present State of the Study of Politics,” *The American Political Science Review* 15, no. 2 (1921): 173–85; Charles E. Merriam, “Recent Advances in Political Methods,” in *Discipline and History: Political Science in the United States*, eds. James Farr and Raymond Seidelman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1923] 1993), 129–46; Heaney and Hansen, “Building the Chicago School,” 589–96; Barry Dean Karl, *Charles E. Merriam and the Study of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

68. Dwaine Marvick, “Introduction,” in *Harold D. Lasswell on Political Sociology*, ed. Dwaine Marvick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 26–27. See also Almond, “Harold Dwight Lasswell,” 252.

69. A sampling of this work includes Harold D. Lasswell, “The Status of Research on International Propaganda and Opinion,” *Papers and Proceedings of the American Sociological Society* 20 (1925): 198–209; Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1927); Harold D. Lasswell, “The Theory of Political Propaganda,” *American Political Science Review* 21 (1927): 627–31; Harold D. Lasswell, “The Function of the Propagandist,” *International Journal of Ethics* 38 (1928): 258–68; Lasswell, “The Measurement of Public Opinion,” 311–26; Harold D. Lasswell, “The Strategy of Revolutionary and War Propaganda,” in *Public Opinion and World-Politics*, ed. Quincy Wright (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1933), 185–221; Harold D. Lasswell, “The Person: Subject and Object of Propaganda,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 179 (1935): 187–93; Harold D. Lasswell, “The Study and Practice of Propaganda,” in *Propaganda and Promotional Activities: An Annotated Bibliography*, ed. Harold D. Lasswell, Ralph D. Casey, and Bruce Lannes Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1935), 3–27; Harold D. Lasswell, “The Propagandist Bids for Power,” *The American Scholar* 8, (1939): 350–57; Harold D. Lasswell, “Describing the Contents of Communications,” in *Propaganda, Communication, and Public Opinion: A Comprehensive Reference Guide*, ed. Bruce Lannes Smith, Harold D. Lasswell, and Ralph D. Casey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 74–94; Harold D. Lasswell, “The Structure and Function of Communication in Society,” in *The Communication of Ideas: A Series of Addresses*, ed. Lyman Bryson (New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1948a), 37–52.

70. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, 191; Lasswell, “Political Propaganda,” 631.

an environment afforded elites an opportunity to reinforce or expand their social, political, and economic authority through the shaping and transmission of such symbols to a wide audience. Mass culture proved the ideal vehicle for this process.⁷¹

Lasswell's Taos essay thus was not an entirely odd publication choice for the Institute. Not only did the article address themes that Institute members themselves were beginning to engage with. More importantly, Horkheimer and his colleagues knew that Lasswell's interest in culture extended well beyond Taos peyote rituals and, in fact, included the type of culture they found most interesting—mass culture. It is likely, therefore, that Horkheimer's decision to publish Lasswell's Taos essay was as much a result of his interest in Lasswell's research as it was a professional courtesy.

By 1937, Horkheimer's relations with the University of Chicago had evolved to such a point that prominent members of its sociology and political science departments agreed to add their names to the list of the Institute's American "Advisory Committee." This was, notably, the same year that "The Latest Attack on Metaphysics" and "Traditional and Critical Theory" were published in the *Zeitschrift*. First the sociologist Louis Wirth and then Lasswell and Merriam became Advisory Committee members. Their names appeared on the Institute's official stationery in 1940.⁷²

In the summer of 1940, the Institute was developing ideas and proposals for two long-term research projects. The first was an examination of the growth and popularization of anti-Semitism in the West; the second was a study of the cultural conditions in Germany that had made the rise of Nazism possible. Only the former project was completed, in the form of the multivolume *Studies in Prejudice*. The proposal on German culture—tentatively entitled "Cultural Aspects of National Socialism"—failed to secure adequate funding, although Neumann explored many of the project's themes in his individual work of 1942, *Behemoth*. To finance these ventures, Horkheimer and his colleagues tried to procure backing from institutions like the American Jewish Committee and the Rockefeller Foundation. The Institute prepared budgets, wrote detailed proposals, and sought letters of reference. Horkheimer and, later, Neumann, contacted Lasswell as well as Merriam for assistance with these preparations. Adorno had prepared the ground in July 1940, when he sent a long, carefully worded letter to Merriam. The letter, which went through at least two drafts, described the group's critical theoretical orientation and even directed Merriam to Horkheimer's "Metaphysics" and "Traditional and Critical Theory" essays. There was no effort to hide the Institute's negative attitude toward

71. Lasswell, "Political Propaganda," 631.

72. Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 222, 380 n.279.

scientism as “mere fact collecting.”⁷³ Several weeks later, Horkheimer sent Merriam a copy of the research proposal on German culture, and asked for his comments and suggestions. Merriam acknowledged receipt of the proposal, but either was unwilling to respond in depth or did not understand what Horkheimer was asking of him.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, Horkheimer and the Institute continued to build a productive relationship with Lasswell, who had left the University of Chicago for a position at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The Frankfurt School published yet another one of his articles in a 1941 issue of *SPSS*. According to the article, popular radio could perform the “socially significant purpose” of “insecurity reduction.”⁷⁵ Radio broadcasts, by clarifying difficult moral conundrums and conveying information about common psychological neuroses, could function like systematic therapeutic programs, offering listeners “insight” into their own “anxiety level” and helping them determine whether and what kind of treatment they might need.⁷⁶ Although Lasswell affirmed that culture was a tool of political elites, then, he noted that this need not mean that culture was inherently repressive. Much depended on the use to which culture was put *by* elites. It stood to reason that if culture could train the masses to accept political authority with “a minimum of dissent,” culture also could train the masses to become healthier, more productive citizens.

Institute members undoubtedly bristled at Lasswell’s conclusion that mass radio could help individuals adapt to modern society. Yet the article manifested important conceptual parallels between Lasswell’s vision of the politics of culture and that of the Institute. Lasswell was claiming, just as Horkheimer did in “Art and Mass Culture” and Adorno did in “On Popular Music” (essays which appeared in the same *SPSS* volume as Lasswell’s article), that the political significance of culture lay in its ability to acclimatize individuals to their surrounding environment through suggestive symbols and messages.⁷⁷ In other words, Lasswell *agreed* with Adorno’s claim that consumers of mass culture were fed a “pre-given and pre-accepted” definition of their social environment.⁷⁸ Adorno and Lasswell *differed* in that Adorno saw such training as politically deleterious, while Lasswell saw it as politically useful, or at least stabilizing.

73. Theodor Adorno to Charles E. Merriam, 30 July 1940, Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box I, folder 18, documents 340–42, 344–53.

74. See Charles E. Merriam to Max Horkheimer, 31 October 1940, Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box I, folder 18, document 338; Charles E. Merriam to Friedrich Pollock, 29 May 1941, Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box I, folder 18, document 336.

75. Harold D. Lasswell, “Radio as an Instrument of Reducing Personal Insecurity,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, no. 1 (1941): 55.

76. Lasswell, “Radio,” 56.

77. Theodor W. Adorno, “On Popular Music,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, no. 1 (1941): 17–48; Horkheimer, “Art and Mass Culture,” 290–304.

78. Adorno, “On Popular Music,” 18.

Despite this normative disagreement, Lasswell and Institute shared a vision of how mass culture *worked*. The primary political purpose of mass culture was to manipulate consumers into thinking and behaving in ways conducive to social order. In other words, they agreed about culture's political *operation*, if not its normative *value*.

Recognizing this agreement, Lasswell and the Frankfurt School continued to collaborate in their research concerning the politics of culture. In early 1941, as the United States mobilized for war, Lasswell responded to Horkheimer's request for assistance on the nascent German culture project with numerous editorial and methodological suggestions.⁷⁹ Horkheimer sent Lasswell a revised proposal that included almost all the edits that Lasswell had suggested. The most notable change was an explicit plan to "associate young American scientists with the project." This, Lasswell thought, would benefit both the Institute and its research partners.⁸⁰ In none of Lasswell's notes did he argue that the Institute's proposal was too philosophically or normatively inclined. Nor did Horkheimer express concern that Lasswell's input risked "scientizing" the project. On the contrary, both showed interest in the other's opinion and in the research venture as a whole, because the study accorded with both Lasswell's and the Institute's conceptualization of culture as a tool to transmit political authority.

Shortly afterwards, Neumann asked Lasswell if he would chair Neumann's individual section of the German culture project, entitled "Ideological Permeation of Labor and the New Middle Classes." Neumann cited Lasswell's work on the "garrison state" and the psychology of Hitlerism as evidence of Lasswell's expertise in "the psychology of authoritarianism," and argued that Lasswell therefore was an apt choice for the position.⁸¹ Lasswell acquiesced. Throughout the spring and summer of 1941, the two communicated via post, telephone, and face-to-face conversation.⁸² As Lasswell had done when reviewing Horkheimer's proposal a few months earlier, he focused on refining the methodological framework of Neumann's project.⁸³ Lasswell reviewed at least three drafts of the proposal, and met with Neumann at least once in Washington to discuss the editorial critiques of the Rockefeller Foundation. When efforts to secure these

79. Harold D. Lasswell to Max Horkheimer, 13 February 1941, Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box I, folder 16, documents 90–91.

80. Max Horkheimer to Harold D. Lasswell, 10 March 1941, Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box I, folder 16, documents 88–89.

81. Franz Neumann to Harold D. Lasswell, 1 April 1941, Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box I, folder 16, document 86.

82. See the collection of letters between Neumann and Lasswell in the Max Horkheimer Archive, Box I, folder 16, documents 76–86.

83. Franz Neumann to Harold D. Lasswell, 28 April 1941, Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box I, folder 16, document 83.

funds failed, Neumann submitted a proposal to the New York Foundation. Lasswell wrote a letter of support and solicited another letter from a contact at the Department of Justice.⁸⁴ Here again, a Frankfurt School Critical Theorist and political scientist from the Chicago School appeared perfectly able, and perhaps even eager, to exchange substantive ideas. Far from falling into battle over the normative or scientific merits of the Institute's research venture, both sides demonstrated interest in the study of the politics of culture.

The New York Foundation ultimately rejected the Institute's proposal. The German culture project soon foundered for lack of funds. Neumann sought support from the American Jewish Committee for his anti-Semitism project, and considered naming Lasswell the project's co-director.⁸⁵ Even though the Columbia sociologist Robert Lynd was eventually named co-director, Lasswell continued to engage in preliminary research for the venture. He wrote yet another letter of support, in which he praised the Institute's work on culture:

Thank you very much for your invitation to serve on a committee to sponsor the Institute's project on anti-Semitism. I accept with alacrity. Few topics are more urgent than this and few institutions are of equal competence to your own for the successful prosecution of research. Your Institute is distinguished for careful study of individual and cultural processes and is admirably equipped to bring out the full complexity of the interrelationships involved.⁸⁶

Lasswell, Horkheimer, and Neumann clearly worked closely on the two long-term research projects. Even though the German culture project never came to fruition, the anti-Semitism project preoccupied Institute members for the remainder of their stay in America. The project culminated in the multivolume *Studies in Prejudice*, published in 1949 and 1950. Certainly the Frankfurt School sought Lasswell's help because of his status and influence within the American academy. But, the extent and tenor of their collaboration suggest that the Institute also sincerely believed that Lasswell could enhance its research ventures.

Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, then, Lasswell, Horkheimer, and Neumann not only supported each other's work. They also shared intellectual ground and swapped ideas about shared areas of interest, most notably the politics of culture. Most disciplinary narratives concerning Critical Theory and empirical political science in the early 1940s, however, stress only the antagonisms between these groups of scholars.

84. Harold D. Lasswell to Franz Neumann, 7 July 1941, Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box I, folder 16, document 77.

85. Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 383 n.322.

86. Institute for Social Research, "A Research Project on Anti-Semitism," Max Horkheimer Archive: Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, box IX, folder 92, document 7a.

Rethinking Disciplinary Divisions

One obvious response to the argument above is that contact between the Institute and Lasswell was motivated less by substantive intellectual concerns than by professional propriety. Because the University of Chicago almost housed the Institute and because individual Chicago scholars had written letters of support, sharp criticism of University of Chicago scholars, akin to the kind the denouncements that the Institute had leveled against Dewey, would have been seen as awkward and ungracious, if not outright detrimental to the Frankfurt School's valued professional connections.

In addition, one might speculate that the Institute, while applying to U.S. universities in 1933 and 1934, exaggerated or dissembled about its commitment to empirical methodology. Both Wheatland and Martin Jay have suggested that the Institute intentionally presented its early studies on the decline of the traditional family structure in the West as amenable to empirical methods.⁸⁷ Perhaps as a result of this empirical disguise, Lasswell and other American scholars envisioned the Institute as containing kindred spirits, and Horkheimer may have been willing to allow the misrecognition to persist.

Finally, it might be argued that even if Lasswell and Merriam were aware of the Institute's hostility toward scientism, they did not understand it (or at least not very well). After all, debates over the philosophy of science were in their infancy in the United States prior to the mid-1930s and the immigration of European scholars. Gunnell notes, for instance, that the Institute's censure of scientism was part of a much larger and peculiarly European debate that had begun during the 1920s in Weimar Germany and intensified after 1933.⁸⁸ Consequently, "the positivist image of science that many émigré theorists struck out against in American social science was, ironically, less one generated in this country than one that they brought with them."⁸⁹ On this view, the Frankfurt School's attack on American research methods extended a Weimar debate, but the context and the purpose of that debate were largely lost on an American audience.⁹⁰ It is conceivable, therefore, that during the ongoing communication between the Institute and Lasswell and Merriam, the American interlocutors were unaware of or uninterested in the Institute's approach to the philosophy of science, and never plumbed deeply into potential political and philosophical differences.

All of the above conjectures *do* help contextualize the working relationship between members of the Frankfurt and Chicago Schools during the late 1930s and early 1940s. And they can help the United States understand why the Institute

87. Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 130; Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 43–44, 59–60.

88. Gunnell, *Descent*, 164.

89. Gunnell, *Descent*, 192.

90. See also Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment*, 117–18.

remained so wedded to its interpretation (or misinterpretation) of Dewey. It seems plausible, in other words that Horkheimer and company would have been averse to upsetting the partnership they had so carefully constructed with Lasswell and, to a lesser extent, Merriam. Presumably, they would not have had similar hesitations about criticizing Dewey.

Still, I believe these three historical speculations fail to tell an important part of the story. The frequency and content of the interactions between members of the Institute and political scientists at Chicago indicate that their collaboration was not completely insincere or superficial. This was *particularly* true with regard to the Institute's cooperation with Lasswell. These scholars took an active interest in each other's work, especially as it concerned the politics of culture; and there is little evidence to suggest that either Lasswell or the Frankfurt School did so duplicitously (recall that Adorno even directed Merriam to Horkheimer's most vehement criticisms of scientism). They exchanged detailed descriptions and extensive samples of their scholarship, and sought each other's advice in developing substantive research projects. It is difficult to maintain that these scholars committed so much time and energy to each other merely to keep up appearances. Nor does it seem likely that one side was simply misunderstood by the other due to different conceptual and discursive frameworks. Far from failing to communicate across a hypothetical divide of "theory versus science" a "European Émigré versus American worldview," the historical record indicates that during the 1930s and early 1940s leading figures of both Critical Theory and empirical political science worked together quite well, at least on projects relevant to their respective research.

This pattern of collation suggests that even our most established disciplinary divisions might not be as sharp and neat as we often believe. Certainly, Frankfurt School Critical Theorists and scholars associated with the Chicago School of Political Science diverged on a number of important political and methodological issues. Yet, prior to the early 1940s, members of these two groups, often portrayed today as binary opposites, collaborated.

This finding also leaves the United States with difficult but important questions. If these scholars did share common intellectual ground with respect to culture, why did their communication taper off after 1941? More broadly, what happened within the discipline of political science during the 1940s and 1950s such that their productive conversations were so quickly forgotten, replaced by the binary rhetoric of Whyte, Hallowell, Golling, Almond, and Wolin?⁹¹

Given the lack of evidence of an explicit break or *contretemps* between Lasswell and the Institute, perhaps the most persuasive explanation is that "internal,"

91. I thank an anonymous reviewer at *Polity* for encouraging both my thinking on these questions, as well as my terminology in engaging them.

individual-level changes played a determining role in disrupting collaboration between Lasswell and the Institute. In April 1941, Horkheimer left New York for Los Angeles to begin intensive work on a long-planned book on social philosophy, later to be published as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Marcuse and Adorno soon followed. Horkheimer's move marked the beginning of the end of the Institute's relationship with Columbia. Subsequently Neumann, who did not follow Horkheimer to the West Coast, scrambled to find new employment.⁹² Lasswell's attention was also drawn elsewhere. First, he worked for the U.S. government during World War II, and in 1946 he moved to the Yale Law School. Four years later, Horkheimer and Adorno returned to Frankfurt and took the remaining institutional apparatus of their group with them. These momentous changes in the lives and careers of all involved required alterations of many prior plans and future goals.⁹³ Absent further evidence, it seems likely the dissociation of Lasswell and the Institute was due more to these personal moves than to larger disciplinary shifts during the early 1940s.

That said, the individual movements of Lasswell and Frankfurt School members after 1941 did, in some sense, symbolize broader transformations in American political science. By sequestering themselves in Hollywood to produce their abstruse masterpiece, Horkheimer and Adorno literally and figuratively withdrew from a disciplinary discourse in which they had been involved. The pair never again would seek to develop a relationship with mainstream political science, nor would they be invited to do so. Lasswell, on the other hand, was hired by one of America's premier educational institutions largely because his prodigious scholarship meshed with increasing demands, both inside and outside the discipline, to devise more scientific and indeed behavioral methods for the study of politics.⁹⁴

Thus, while Lasswell and the Institute's lapse of communication was not directly due to disciplinary tensions between Critical Theory and empirical political science, it *did* coincide with evolving narratives concerning the divide between "political theory" and "political science." Once the Lasswell-Institute connection folded, few were interested in recovering, reviving, or repeating what had been, only a few years earlier, a remarkably constructive relationship between a self-identified political scientist and several self-identified Critical Theorists. Viewed in light of the increasing "dislocation" of political science from political theory in the

92. Neumann secured some funding once the American Jewish Committee decided to fund the anti-Semitism project, but much of his income during the early 1940s came from the US government, where he served as a chief consultant on the Board of Economic Warfare, and, later, as a chief economist of the Intelligence Division of the US Chief of Staff. See Barry M. Katz, "The Criticism of Arms: The Frankfurt School Goes to War," *The Journal of Modern History* 59, no. 3 (1987): 439–78; Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 293–94.

93. See, for instance, Almond, "Harold Dwight Lasswell," 262–63; Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 291ff.

94. Demands, it should be noted, that were often backed by considerable sums of grant and foundation money. See, for instance, Hauptmann, "From Opposition to Accommodation," 643–44.

following decades, the demise and subsequent forgetting of that relationship appear a missed opportunity.⁹⁵

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95. See Gunnell, "Dislocated Rhetoric," 771.